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EDITORIAL

THE COOPERATION OF THE PHARMACIST IN THE VENEREAL DISEASES CAMPAIGN

For several decades the only liaison between the health authorities of Great Britain and the pharmacist has been almost entirely a restrictive one. The Venereal Diseases Act of 1917, which forbade the treatment of venereal diseases by persons other than registered medical practitioners, caused little interference with the interest of the reputable chemists. The interference was slight in degree but it had an immediate restrictive effect upon "across the counter" treatment which at that time was thought to be very common. Prosecutions for infringements of this Act have been few and far between since that date and this is a tribute to the ready collaboration of the pharmacist. During the present war the inclusion of the sulphonamides in the list of drugs contained in the Fourth Schedule of the Poisons Rules has had the effect of closely regulating the sale of these compounds.

The recent inauguration by the Ministry of Health of a movement to take full advantage of the cooperative spirit of the pharmacists in matters of health will be of special interest to our readers. In a foreword to the first number of the *Ministry of Health Bulletin* which appeared in the *Pharmaceutical Journal* of 1st January, 1944, Sir Wilson Jameson, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, recognizes that the pharmacists are particularly well situated to second the efforts of the Ministry to educate the public to a higher standard of health, and he welcomes the offer from the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and the National Pharmaceutical Union to cooperate in the campaign.

In these *Bulletins*, which will be issued at quarterly intervals by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Pharmaceutical Society, the inclusion of memoranda on official health policies and on the health education campaign will, it is hoped, add to the pharmacist's interest in the promotion of better health. The aim of this new venture is to provide interesting, accurate information which will help the pharmacist to give good advice to the general public; many ways are suggested in which he can give active support to the health campaign both through his personal influence with his customers and by his active participation in civic efforts such as health exhibitions, lectures and films.

Two excellent and authoritative articles appeared in the first *Bulletin*. One was on droplet infection by Dr. W. H. Bradley and the other on the venereal diseases problem in England and Wales by Colonel L. W. Harrison. In the latter article the increasing war-time incidence of syphilis is commented upon in some detail. Progress in anti-venereal disease measures such as the tracing of contacts is also discussed.

In discussing the great value of the drugs of the sulphonamide series Colonel Harrison draws attention to the risk of serious toxic reactions from uncontrolled self-treatment as well as the probability of producing a large number of symptomless gonococcus carriers and indicates that for this reason the sulphonamides were included in the Fourth Schedule of the Poisons Rules. Few pharmacists at the present time are unaware of the potency of the sulphonamides in the majority of gonococcal infections and that treatment is readily available at the venereal diseases clinics. Presumably the health authorities have supplied the pharmacists with a list of such clinics in their neighbourhood as well as data concerning other local health services. Colonel Harrison rightly points out that no new medical discovery is necessary to convert the venereal diseases problem into a minor one

in any country. The prime necessity is that infected persons and those who have the slightest suspicion that they have become infected should seek skilled advice and undergo any treatment that may be required. It is important that those to whom an appeal may be made for information or advice should appreciate the fact that many an infected woman is unaware of her state of health owing to the mildness of her symptoms.

In the Editorial in the first number of the *Bulletin*, which is intended to arouse the interest of the practising pharmacist, there is curiously enough little reference to the important contribution made to our medicinal armamentarium by the skilled workers in the research departments of the drug manufacturers. The pharmacists in general are doubtless very conscious and rightly proud of their magnificent achievement in the synthesis of drugs that have proved of immense value to mankind. In few branches of Medicine is this debt more apparent than in our own speciality for which the efforts of the research chemists have produced in recent years remedies of outstanding value. Now it is the rank and file of the pharmacists to whom the appeal is made to play a greater part in the improvement of the health of the nation by active participation in health education.

The second *Ministry of Health Bulletin*, which appeared in the *Pharmaceutical Journal* of 1st April, 1944, contains sections on malaria, gonorrhoea and diphtheria. In the article on "Modern Views on Gonorrhoea" Colonel Harrison expounds briefly the more important facts of the nature and effects of this disease. Here the pharmacist will find a lucid and comprehensive review which contains all the essential information concerning the mode of spread, the treatment and the curability, the complications and the effects which may follow neglect of treatment; reference is also made to the frequent triviality of the symptoms in some cases, particularly so far as women are concerned.

The avidity of the general public for the informative literature produced by the Central Council for Health Education doubtless has its counterpart in the customer's request to the pharmacist for information on general health matters. Probably he will find that public interest in information about venereal diseases will gradually increase as the educational drive gathers momentum. The articles appearing in these *Bulletins* should be of great value to pharmacists who wish to be in touch with modern trends in health education.

An account in the *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association* of July, 1933 of the active participation of pharmacists in the United States of America, is of much interest and pertinency at the present time. As far back as 1940 a link-up was effected between the American Pharmaceutical Association and the American Social Hygiene Association in the national effort to cope with venereal disease incidence. The joint committee considered that the pharmacist could play an important part in using his influence with those who consult him because they fear they are infected. The drug-store was considered to be an important centre for health education and displays, for it is estimated that every family in a community visits a pharmacy once in every week in the year. A good instance of effective cooperation is portrayed in the social hygiene campaign held at Bridgeport, Connecticut, in which all the 115 drug-stores lent window-space for a month for the purpose of giving social hygiene displays. At the end of the campaign questionnaires to pharmacists produced evidence of approval and interest in the programme. A permanent committee has since been organized to continue this work within the structure of the Council of Social Agencies.

Without a doubt the British pharmacist will play a helpful part in the campaign against venereal diseases as well as in other health matters. The closer liaison in public health matters between Medicine and pharmacy which will follow this innovation is one that will doubtless endure; certainly it should prove to be of inestimable value in the future.